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## Work Organization and Social Challenges

*Organisation du travail et enjeux sociaux*

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## Introduction

- 1 Ce numéro est doublement spécial, d'abord parce qu'il est issu d'une sélection de textes du Congrès mondial de sociologie tenu à Durban, en 2006, mais deuxièmement, parce que c'est le premier numéro à être produit entièrement en anglais. La revue *Interventions économiques* avait manifesté son intention de publier des articles ou numéros en anglais, et c'est donc ici la première initiative en ce sens...ce qui m'amène à passer à l'anglais pour la présentation des textes.
- 2 This special issue is based on papers from the International Sociological Association conference held in Durban, in July 2006. Many papers were presented there on different themes, and a call for papers for this journal was distributed at the conferences. Papers were evaluated and the following retained for publication in this issue.
- 3 The context of internationalization and the globalization of trade relations have important effects upon the well-known forms of economic organizations that characterized the fordist phase of capitalism, as is highlighted in Klaus Schmierl's paper. The author reminds us that within the context of a transformation of national economies towards a knowledge-based society, economic and social sciences center largely on economic sectors that are termed 'high-tech sectors'. Schmierl indicates that they are seen as the main drivers of knowledge creation and innovation and prototypes of new collective forms of organization. However, the author reminds us the low-tech sector (like in the paper & pulp industry, textile industry, food industry and wood industry) are also undergoing change, but are much less studied. The central dimension of Schmierl's paper is that well-known classical patterns of creating innovations are changing. Innovation processes are not developed exclusively within 'knowledge intensive' (high-

tech) companies, but rather between companies of different sectors. This has two consequences : first, the so-called high-tech industry influences non-high-tech branches as well as important suppliers of innovative solutions. But also, Schmierl highlights that the particular requirements and conditions of so-called low-tech branches affect companies of high-tech industries as specific drivers of innovation. In this perspective, intersectoral cooperation has become a main source of innovation. The main thesis of Schmierl's paper is that today's knowledge is no longer located within one company originating from one industrial sector, but rather it is distributed along the respective value-chain and various sectors.

- 4 In their paper, Karolus Kraan and Peter Oei discuss the issue of production concepts. They present a research where old versus new production concepts (NPCs) and employment relation instruments are studied to find out which yield high employee performance and low job strain. The paper is based on a survey conducted in 2005 149 supervisors and employees. In the past decades, in reaction to dysfunctions of Tayloristic and professional bureaucratic production concepts and employment relations, several new forms of employment relations and NPCs, appeared. Examples are the Socio-technical NPC and customized employment relations. In this study both this NPC and customized employment relations - i.e. customized performance targets - demonstrate positive associations with employee performance. According to Socio-technical theory the design of employment relations is relatively unimportant, as human resources are mobilised primarily by the production concept. The results for this NPC show the legitimacy of this assumption, because its high employee performance is irrespective of the employment relation instruments. On the contrary, in the other NPCs and in professional bureaucracies, the employment relation instruments of respectively an increased period needed for learning the job, and customized performance targets can compensate for the lower employee performance in these production concepts. Surprisingly maybe, at least according to what had been expected by some, the authors found no indication of increased job strain, due to new production concepts, or to new employment relations.
- 5 In the following paper, Jan de Leede, Rien Huiskamp, Peter Oei, Aukje Nauta, Anneke Goudswaard, Tobias Kwakkelstein assess the actual experiences of companies in the context of individualised employment relationships. They address three questions : (1) what issues of the employment relationship can be individually negotiated in organizations ? (scope) ; (2) what issues of the employment relationship are individually negotiated in organizations ? (actual use) ; (3) what are the advantages and disadvantages of negotiations according to employees and managers ? The authors conducted four case studies in Dutch companies in different sectors (telecom, insurance, manufacturing and consultancy). The data were collected in a total of 69 semi-structured interviews with line managers, HR managers and shop floor employees, and they focused on five topics of the employment relation : contract, working hours, wages, development and performance. The authors found that the scope for negotiation differs according to topic : there is considerable scope with regard to working hours, development and contract and little scope with regard to wages and performance goals. However, employees and supervisors use the scope for negotiating only for working hours and to a lesser extent development. On other topics negotiations hardly take place (e.g. contract) or only under specific conditions (e.g. performance goals in non-routine processes). Furthermore, we found that employees and managers perceive both advantages and disadvantages of negotiations.

These elements are extremely interesting in terms of a concrete knowledge of the evolution of work and employment relationships.

- 6 Another paper brings us to the context of Mexico and maquiladoras. The paper is by Patrick Gun-Cunningham and shows that the local and global configurations of identity in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, and in El Paso, Texas, are determined by the processes of economic globalisation, whose main manifestation is or has been until recently the maquiladora assembly plant. The author indicates that studies on border identities have emphasized more socio-cultural processes and have not analysed economic processes sufficiently as decisive in the construction of identities. The paper identifies the salient characteristics of the identities of maquiladora workers and ex-workers on both sides of the border and tries to ascertain if transnational identities are emerging because of the impacts of globalisation, and what impacts these imply for cultural and social policy in “Paso del Norte”. The author concludes that the men and women workers and ex-workers of the maquiladoras of Paso del Norte are living and working at the interstices between globalisation and localization. For example, the author says “they work in cutting-edge high technology industries, where they are immersed in an alien environment of hermetic hygiene and shining technological brilliance, while receiving subsurvival wages that impose harsh life conditions and opportunities outside the factory wall, where they take filthy dirty 30-year-old buses with broken, vandalized seats, loose hand rails in a state of dangerous disrepair, that will take them to their ramshackle dwellings in the poorer western districts of the city, often constructed from the toxic containers of maquiladora raw materials and products”. The author concludes that “it is not surprising that the hours spent in the maquiladora, clean, ordered monuments to the spirit of modernity, well-heated in winter, cooled by air-conditioning in the torrid summers, are the most appreciated, despite the relentless production line rhythms that don’t permit toilet breaks for the entirety of a nine-hour shift”.
- 7 All these papers shed light on new forms of work organization, new production concepts and their application in various national contexts. We want to thank all the authors who proposed papers for this issue.

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